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1489











SPARE WELL

SPEND WELL;

OR,

The Adventures of a Five Franc Piece.



LONDON:  
T. NELSON AND SONS, PATERNOSTER ROW;  
EDINBURGH; AND NEW YORK.

1865.





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# HISTORY OF A FIVE FRANC PIECE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE NEW YEAR'S GIFT.

THOUGH I have been but thirty years in existence I have seen much, travelled much, and, if I have not felt much (for I am not of a sensitive nature), I have at least made others feel, I have excited desire and regret, avarice and pleasure. I have called forth ambition, disappointed, or realized hope. I have sometimes relieved misfortune ; but have more frequently satisfied the caprices and fancies of the spoilt children of prosperity. In my ever changing career, I have had periods of great activity, I have passed rapidly from the palace of the great to the dwelling of the artisan, but I have scarcely ever entered the miserable shelter of the poor. At present I am im-

soned in the strong box of an old miser, and here I must most likely remain till the day of his death, when his greedy heirs will dispute who is to possess me. As this moment may still be far distant, I have taken a fancy to employ my leisure in repeating the varied incidents of my life, from the happy day when, brilliant in youthful splendour, I issued fresh from the mint, to swell the public treasure.\*

For several weeks I remained in the Treasury, lost in a crowd of others like myself. Some fresh and bright like me, had never been soiled by human touch ; others, on the contrary, rubbed, worn, dirty, from the mud that one gathers in passing through the world, were enjoying a momentary repose before going forth again to stir up the troubled waters of human passion.

On the 31st of December, a great many of our number were taken from our prison and packed up to recompense the toils (?) of the Ministers of State. I fell to the lot of a clerk in the Home Office. Although I was the most

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\* A franc is about tenpence of our money. A five franc piece is sometimes called a crown, but it is not of so much value as an English crown piece. A centime is the hundredth part of a franc.

shining and brilliant of all the pieces of money which made up his quarter's salary, he did not appear to value me more than the rest, and placed me in a bag along with my companions. In his eyes I was only one of the means of procuring him the various things he wished to possess ; it never once entered his imagination to love me for my own sake. The poor man, constantly chained to his very prosaic work, had lost all sense of the beautiful. Not so his wife, she was still alive to the natural admiration of bright and pretty things, and she looked at me almost tenderly, whilst her husband was employed in dividing my companions into various little parcels, which he wrapped up in paper, and then wrote on one "Rent," on another "Baker," on a third "Grocer." Just as he laid his hand on me to put me into a little parcel intended for the "Apothecary," he was stopped by his wife—"Oh, Joseph !" she exclaimed, "do not give away this shining new five franc piece."

"It is not worth a centime more than the others," replied her husband, "besides, you cannot put it in a frame or under a glass case to look at, we have not more than we need to

pay all our accounts. It is really terrible, we can never lay by anything."

"Let us thank God, my dear," said his wife, "that this year we are not in debt, and let us not vex ourselves about the future; but as to this shining piece of money, could you not lay it by for a New Year's gift for our little Henry? Do you not remember that you promised him a five franc piece on the New Year's Day after he should be nine years old?"

"Well! be it so; children like what glitters."

This consent given, the lady wrapped me up in a piece of delicate pink silk paper, and I was put into her drawer till the morning of the New Year. At the early dawn, little Henry went to his mother's room, and, whilst his lips uttered the usual compliments of the season, his wandering eyes seemed to be looking about for the expected present. At length his father placed me in his hand, and eagerly tearing off my delicate wrapper, he exclaimed, in a delighted tone—"Five francs! I never had so much money in all my life before. How many things I can buy with five francs! I want a whip, a little gun, a cane, lead soldiers,

gingerbread, and barley-sugar. Mamma, will you go with me to-day to buy all these things?"

"I am not sure if we can go to-day, for you know we promised to spend the day with grandmamma."

"Oh, yes, I remember; but grandmamma will be sure to give me some presents too. Perhaps she may give me a new ball, a top, a large kite!" And the little boy forgot his plans of shopping in his conjectures what new gifts he might receive.

After admiring me for a while, Henry put me into a pretty purse that his sister gave him, and, in the course of the morning, his little hand was often slipped into his pocket to make sure that his new treasure was quite safe.

## CHAPTER II.

## MONEY WELL SPENT.

ON the way to his grandmother's house, he passed with his mother through a street, where his eyes were attracted by many toyshops, filled with new toys for the season.

Every one knows how bright and attractive the toyshops look on New Year's Day, and how many pretty trifles and ingenious devices are displayed to the eyes of the admiring children. This is one of the means employed by the inventive genius of trade to satisfy the feverish greediness which is one of the diseases of human nature at all ages. Henry was seized with this fever: he wished to buy everything,—he coveted everything he saw. At every few steps he pulled his mother's cloak, to call her attention to some new thing that he desired to have. His mother was so kind as to stop very often, to ask the price of the various toys he fancied, but as he always coveted the largest and the best, the answer *was always unfavourable*—ten francs, twelve

francs, fifteen francs,—all too much for Henry's purse.

"There is nothing pretty to be got for five francs," said he, in a discontented tone, as he came out of the last shop. The poor child so rich in imagination in the morning, thought himself poor before he reached his grandmother's house. So true is it that riches and poverty are comparative. As for me, I felt my self-importance considerably lessened in the course of that morning walk.

In the evening, Henry laid his purse on the table, saying,—"Well, I hope that before to-morrow evening I shall have spent my five francs."

"Is it absolutely necessary to spend the whole at once?" said his mother.

"Certainly. What other use are they for!" replied the child, striking the table with his purse, so as to make a ringing sound.

"Would it not be better to wait for an opportunity of spending them well, than be in haste to buy at once something quite useless?"

"Pooh, pooh! everything is useful if it amuses me! For one thing, I might get a good many fireworks for five francs."

The little man went to sleep, and dreamed of squibs and rockets, while his prudent mother thought of the best means of teaching her little boy how to spend his money well, and to moderate his wishes.

The next day, the visit of a very poor woman gave Henry's mother an opportunity of putting his better feelings to the proof. He stood by his mother, and listened to the poor woman's story of her misery and sufferings, and he then saw his mother give her some food and a small parcel of clothes.

"I would have wished to put a pair of shoes into the parcel, my poor Fanchette," said she, "but my purse is quite empty; if I can, I will buy you a pair soon."

"Oh, Ma'am! you have been too kind already," said the old woman, as she gratefully took her leave. Henry looked with pity at her poor naked feet appearing through her ragged shoes.

"Are shoes very dear?" whispered he to his mother.

"The cheapest are two francs, my dear."

"And have you not two francs, mamma?"

"Not for this purpose at present, to my

very great regret, for poor Fanchette needs them very much."

Henry slipped his hand into his pocket—drew me half out of his purse, and put me back again several times. At length he said—"Mamma, if I were to buy the shoes, I would still have three francs. This is as much as I had last New Year, and I thought that quite enough then."

The kind mother embraced her little son with a pleasant smile, and her heart filled with thankfulness to see that he felt inclined to be generous and unselfish. She took him out with her to a shop, where she helped him to choose a suitable pair of shoes, for which Henry paid. When he placed me in the shoemaker's hand, his eyes sparkled; he smiled pleasantly; he seemed much happier than when he saw me for the first time. I do not know if the three francs which he received in change procured for him all the pleasure he expected, but I am sure that his first purchase gave him unalloyed pleasure, and that his mother, by directing him to use his money thus, bestowed upon him a pleasant remembrance,—an agreeable picture,—which would

long be stored up in his memory, entitled, "The use of my first five franc piece."

For my part, I was proud of having helped to do a good action, and when the shoemaker threw me into his till, I lay there dreaming of a long series of charitable deeds, in which I should play the first part. In my castles in the air, as in those of many human beings, self was first, charity second—the good deeds were to be done, that I might be glorified and admired.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE BANKER'S WIFE.

IN the shoemaker's shop, however, I was not long in discovering that I was not so important as I had fancied, when I had made little Henry's heart beat, and occupied his thoughts for two whole days. A long time passed away before any one took particular notice of me again. I was thrust into a bag, with many other crowns intended to pay a bill that was due by the shoemaker. I then *passed through* many hands from shop to

shop—from purse to purse—from the grocer's till to the banker's money drawer. I lost my beauty and brilliancy, and was beginning to look quite worn and rubbed, when one day I was put into a very elegant little bag, containing a hundred and nineteen other crown pieces and thirty gold Napoleons. This precious bag was placed on the dressing table of the banker's young wife, who every month spent as large a sum in dresses, perfumes, gloves, and ribbons.

“Oh!” said she to her husband, as she opened the bag, “what dirty money. I hate these horrid five franc pieces. I wish, my dear, you would always send me gold.”

“The money does not remain long enough in your hands to trouble you much,” replied he; “silver does quite well to pay your numerous accounts.”

“Oh, no lectures, I beg! I hate your wearisome calculations. Keep them for your clerks. I think Madame Dufour has just sent me her account, so I will get rid of this horrid change.”

The young wife locked the gold into her writing desk, and then handed the bag of silver to her maid.

"Count that, Victoire," said she, "and see if there is enough in the bag to pay Madame Dufour's account."

Victoire counted the money, and replied, "There is more than enough, Madame. The account is not above 450 francs."

"Very well, then, pay it, and keep the rest for daily expenses. But let me see the account; I have never looked at it."

After having carelessly glanced over the minute details of charges for making, trimmings, and furnishings, which filled four columns, the young lady said,—"This account seems to me quite enormous. Are these things overcharged? You know the prices of them better than I do, Victoire."

"Indeed, Madame," replied Victoire, "the account is not at all overcharged. Madame Dufour is so very conscientious, I do not understand how she can afford to charge such very moderate prices."

"Very well, then, pay what she asks."

That afternoon Victoire paid the milliner four hundred and fifty francs, and received back from her the odd fifty as the price of *her good offices* in procuring for Madame

Dufour such a profitable customer as her rich young mistress. I happened to be among the ten five franc pieces so *honestly* gained by the lady's maid. I was placed in a purse already tolerably well filled, but I did not remain long in it.

That very evening a poor woman was shown into the lady's maid's room. She looked sad and suffering. She brought a dress, which the lady's maid tried on, finding fault all the time with the sewing and the fashion of it. The poor dressmaker promised to alter it as well as she could, but, before going away, she asked, in a low voice, if Mademoiselle Victoire would be so very good as to pay her little account?

“Indeed!” replied she; “you are very impatient. You have scarcely worked for me three months, and you are asking payment already!”

“Mademoiselle Victoire must know that money is scarce among poor people. We need all the little that we work for.”

“I certainly do not know how things go on among *poor* people,” said the lady's maid, in a haughty tone; “but give me the account, I will pay it, and have done with it.”

The poor woman, with a trembling hand, gave a paper to Victoire, who had no sooner cast her eyes upon it than she exclaimed, angrily, "Fifteen francs! what an enormous account! only for having made me a pair of stays, and altered three dresses. Indeed, good woman, you cannot mean to make such a charge. It must be a mistake."

"Mademoiselle will see that the trimmings are included. Indeed, I have charged as low as I could for my work. I reckoned it at the rate of fifteenpence a-day."

"You must work very slowly then; but I mean to pay you, not for the time that you chose to dawdle over your work, but for the work which you have actually done; and I think I am very reasonable when I offer you eight francs. I had not intended to spend more than six on these trifles."

The poor dressmaker remonstrated, but without much effect. After a long discussion, she succeeded in getting ten francs. She put me sadly in her pocket, along with another crown, which she left at the baker's on her way home, to pay an account which she owed him for bread.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE POOR DRESSMAKER.

As she slowly mounted the long, dark stair that led to her miserable room on the fifth storey, the poor woman took me in her hand, and looked at me with a tear in her eye.

“Alas!” said she to herself, “I would like so much to spend this crown in buying a warm dress for my poor child! but I fear that Peter will not give me money this week for the house expenses. Oh! if the young lady had only paid me the fifteen francs. They were so well earned! but there are some people cruel enough to take advantage of poor work-people. They seem never to think that they are taking away our very bread. O my God! keep me from murmuring,” said the poor woman, as she threw herself on her knees in a corner of the room. After having wept and prayed for a few minutes, she rose calm and quiet, put me in a little box, which she hid under a parcel of old clothes in her little press, and then she sat down to work busily.

The next day was Saturday. Little Félix,

the poor woman's child, returned from school with a flushed face, complaining of a bad headache. His mother felt his burning hands and quick pulse, and, much alarmed, hastened to put him to bed, and give him a cooling drink. She was watching by his bedside when his father came in.

"Peter," said his wife, "I am afraid that little Felix is very ill; he ought to be kept warm. I have put our last faggot on the fire. Could you give me a little money to buy wood?"

"My money is not so plenty," said the half intoxicated man.

"But your master has paid you to-night, has he not?"

"What business is it of yours whether he has paid me or not? But there is thirty sous,"\* said he, throwing the money on the table, "and see that you don't ask me for more money for a week at least."

So saying, Peter threw himself on his bed, where he snored till daylight; and, in the morning, set off again to join his wicked companions.

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\* A French sou is about equal to an English halfpenny.

Meantime his poor wife, sure that she could not hope for any help from him, took up the money which he had thrown down, and counted it slowly. "I must have a little sugar," said she, "to make him a cup of tea; a small bit of meat for soup; and wood, wood, we have not a morsel left. How am I to pay for all? I must get him well before I think of a dress for him," said the poor mother, with a sigh, as she drew me out of my hiding-place. "This money *must* go; and when it is spent, God, who sees my misery, will not forsake me. Oh! that I had perfect faith in him; that I could trust this little one to him," continued she, stooping to kiss the child's fevered brow.

The unhappy mother then went hastily down the long stair, and, at the nearest corner, she entered a shop where she gave me in exchange for a few fagots and some smaller pieces of money. I would willingly have remained in her hand if I could, for I felt that she was giving away her last resource; but the wood merchant seized me, and slipped me into his pocket, saying to the woman, "This is nice dry wood; it will burn like a match." Alas! she who had just paid so dear for these

few fagots did not wish them to burn away too quickly.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE SABBATH BREAKER.

MY new master was a little squat man, with a jovial face. I remained all night in his pocket, and went with him, when next morning he went down to open his shop, although it was Sunday.\*

Soon after the door was opened, a little boy rushed in, saying to my new master,—

“ Well, father, what are we to do to-day? you know it is a holiday.”

“ Oh, you little idle thing ! ” said his father, laughing, “ so you are come to coax me to go out. Well, well, only wait till my usual customers have been here. I will shut the shop, and take you somewhere to amuse you.”

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\* In France and other Romanist countries, where many of the people have not the Bible to teach them their true rights, the Sunday is not kept as it is in Britain. In Romanist countries the poorer people are cheated of their day of rest, and made to work either a part or the whole of the time which God has given them for their own, that others may be amused. Thus they open shops, and submit to toil on a day when no human being has a right to demand labour from another. Here we know our rights better, whether we use them well or not.

“ It would be better for you, Mr. Thomas, if you would shut the shop and go to church,” said a neighbour, who was just passing on her way there.

“ Ah, bah ! church is all very well for old women like you,” replied the wicked shop-keeper ; “ for my part, I prefer a well filled shop.”

“ The fool has said in his heart, There is no God,” said the woman, solemnly, as she passed on her way to church.

The shopkeeper was prevented from making any reply by the appearance of his wife, dressed in her best. “ Come,” said she, “ the weather is lovely ; give us a drive in a hackney coach for once, and let us go and dine in the country.”

“ A hackney coach, indeed ! ” said her husband, in a bantering tone ; “ but, however,” continued he, “ things have gone well with me this week. I have a five franc piece in my pocket, which has not yet been in the till ; we may as well go and spend it merrily.”

Half an hour afterwards, the family of the shopkeeper were driving into the country,—before evening I was in the coachman’s pocket,

and, a few minutes afterwards, he threw me upon the counter of a public-house to pay for drink.

I may as well tell here what I afterwards heard of the family of my late master. He was soon after ruined, and ended his days in prison ; and his little son, taught to be a Sabbath-breaker, grew up a thief, and perished miserably, after a career of crime. The prosperity of the wicked is short.

He who saith in his heart there is no God, is indeed a fool, for this world as well as for the next.

Soon after the coachman left me in the tavern, I was packed up with many more like myself, and sent to Dijon to pay an account due by the tavern-keeper to the proprietor of the vineyards, who supplied him with wine.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE DISHONEST SERVANT.

MY first appearance in the country was made in the possession of Madame Thierrens, *the wife of the proprietor of the vineyard.* I

was given by him to his wife, and the gift was accompanied by a long lecture on her extravagance.

“ Each of these five franc pieces,” said he, “ is hardly earned by me, and in your hands they run away like water.”

“ Well, we must eat,” replied Madame ; “ and considering that we have had company at dinner twice last week, I cannot say I think the housekeeping expenses are anything exorbitant.”

“ Oh ! when we have company I find no fault, for I like to have everything right. But it is possible to make a good appearance without spending much money ; there are ways of saving and contriving, even though we must mind appearance.”

Madame Thierrens, though she appeared displeased at her husband’s remarks, did not fail to repeat them the next morning to her cook.

“ Madame thinks,” replied the cook, “ that I buy things too dear. Well, I wish that madame would go herself to market, and see if she can make a better bargain.”

“ No,” replied the mistress ; “ do you go

and do your best to get things cheap. I hope you will not spend all this five franc piece." So saying, she gave me into the hands of the cook.

Jeannette went out, shrugging her shoulders, not in the most respectful manner. She went first to the grocer's shop, where she had a long gossip with the grocer's wife about the avarice of her master and the unreasonableness of her mistress, commenting in a most uncharitable way on the most minute details of their household arrangements.

"Ah!" continued Jeannette, "if I did not take good care of myself, it would not be all I get from them that would make me rich; but you see I manage it all the same, for I mean to put fivepence in my own pocket out of this five franc piece, and I will add it in halfpence to some of the articles of my account."

The grocer's wife answered, "You are quite right; if your mistress will not do you justice, you must take care of yourself."

The next shop into which Jeannette went was a fruiterer's, where, while she was choosing apples, she began the same complaints; but

Here she did not meet with the same encouragement.

“ Does your mistress not pay you your wages ? ” asked the fruiterer’s wife.

“ Oh, certainly ; do you think I would serve her for nothing ? ”

“ Are not you properly fed ? ”

“ We have no luxuries, yet we certainly do not starve.”

“ In that case it seems to me that your mistress has fulfilled her engagements to you. As to perquisites or presents, they are quite voluntary ; you have no right to demand them, and if you are not satisfied, why do you not rather leave the place at once, than go about complaining of it, and speaking evil of your employers ? ”

“ Oh, if I could find a better I would not be long of leaving it ; but good places are scarce.”

“ Good servants are scarce too. All have their faults ; and if we could learn to bear and forbear, it would be better for all, and things would go on better. At all events, my dear Jeannette, remember that the Word of God says, ‘ Servants, be subject to your mas-

ters with all fear ; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward' (1 Pet. ii. 18)."

" Pooh, pooh ! all that is very well in a sermon," said Jeannette, crossly ; " but I cannot stand here all day," continued she, throwing me down on the counter ; " give me my change, and let me go to do my other shopping."

So I parted from Jeannette, but I heard of her afterwards. She was turned out of place after place for pilfering, and having lost her character, she lingered out a miserable old age in the poor-house.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### CHARITY AND OSTENTATION.

IT was on a Saturday when I became the property of the fruiterer's wife. That evening, when the good woman shut her shop, she put me along with several others into a bag, and carried me home with her. There we found her husband and three children ready for supper, and we were laid on a side-table. After the evening meal, the father of the family

opened a large Bible, read a chapter, and then knelt down in prayer with his household. After family worship the three children went to bed, and the husband and wife remained alone talking about their concerns. The wife brought the bag of money to the table, emptied it, separated the copper money from the silver, and counted it, while her husband also produced the bag containing his weekly earnings, and they summed up their accounts together. At last the husband said,—

“We have done well this week ; here are forty francs to spare.”

“God has blessed our labour,” replied the wife ; “shall we not show our gratitude by an offering of thanksgiving ? What do you say, my dear ?”

“You are right,” replied the husband. “‘He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth to the Lord’ (Prov. xix. 17) ; so let us do something for that poor woman whose husband beats her every day, while she is half killing herself to support her children.”

“Very well, that is quite right ; but might we not also give something to the Missionary Society ? It is the only way in which we can

do anything for the heathen, for neither you nor I can go to preach to them. Yet the command remains the same, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature' (Mark xvi. 15). If we cannot go ourselves, we can at least obey the command by helping to send others."

The husband and wife were of one mind, and with one accord they laid me aside to be their offering to the missions. The rest of the money was then tied up in little packets, some to pay for the fruit which they sold, others for various articles of household expense.

Before going to bed, good Madame Renouard put all her house in perfect order, so that she might have nothing to do on Sunday morning. She laid out her children's Sunday dresses, and put a penny in each little pocket, ready to be put in the collection for the poor next day.

For my part, I remained some time in the hands of the clergyman to whom I was given for the Missionary Society. I was locked into his desk, and from time to time other pieces of money were put into the same bag. I observed that the clergyman seemed to have often most pleasure in putting in the smallest sums.

“ There,” said he, while he put in one day a few pence that a working man had saved from his hard earnings, “ these are the gifts that are pleasing in God’s sight,—the fruit of self-denial, the offerings of love.”

I passed from the minister’s writing-desk into the hands of a banker, who had undertaken to remit the sums collected to Paris. One day there was a great dinner party in Dijon, to which this banker was invited: Gaily dressed, he came to his cash-box and took out some money to fill his purse. I happened to be one of the pieces chosen. During the evening, one of the guests at the party told a melancholy story of a fire that had happened in a neighbouring village. Many families had had their houses burned, and had lost their all. The story was pathetically told ; the feelings of the listeners were touched. The lady of the house proposed to make a collection for the sufferers. She took up a little velvet bag, and was going to carry it round the circle of guests, when she was stopped by her husband, who left the room and soon returned carrying a silver plate, which he gave to his wife, saying, in a whisper, “ This

by one stroke of his pen. He was one of those men whose whole thoughts, whose whole actions, whose whole life, have but one object —and that is to enrich themselves. His name at any speculation was a guarantee for its success; he was fortunate in all that he undertook. Proud of his talents for business, he played the despot on the Exchange, and enjoyed being courted to take a part in speculations, in which he was in truth most anxious to share. Rising with the dawn, after having passed half the night at his books, scarcely allowing himself a few minutes for his meals, this rich speculator voluntarily submitted to work harder than the poor labourer who feeds his numerous family by his daily work.

His physical labour, indeed, was small compared to the mental anxiety caused every day by the fluctuations of the stocks,—the arrival of his special messengers from all quarters with news of exciting interest,—the failure of his correspondents, &c. Such a life was indeed a martyrdom, self-imposed by this man, from the love of money. And did this money, it may be asked, procure him all the pleasure he

expected from it? His house indeed was sumptuous, his establishment complete, the luxury of his household arrangements perfect; but the only enjoyment he derived from all this was the pleasure of displaying it in the eyes of others, who, dazzled with the evidence of his success exclaimed, "What a wonderful man Mr. X. is; what a head he has for business; what an immense fortune he has made!" This kind of admiration flattered his vanity, and made amends to him for the long toils and the sleepless nights which he had, even within his silken curtains on his bed of down. Mr. X. did not love money for its own sake, neither did he value the luxuries it would procure. The tranquillity and ease with which he risked his money in fresh speculations, proved that he was actuated by no greedy desire to hoard it up. No! his ambitious mind longed to gain money as a proof of his own talents. Considering his intellectual faculties, in some measure, as a machine for coining gold, he said to himself, "The more I can acquire, the more I am worth; the success of all my undertakings is my title to the esteem and the admiration of men."

Alas! what a false standard of merit! (Luke xii. 13-34; xvi. 19-31.)

Forgotten, by some chance, in the pocket of one of his coats, I shared for some time in his busy life and saw his pursuits; but suddenly Mr. X. fell ill, and I found myself in his room, a silent listener to the daily consultations which he held with his head clerks. When they entered his room, he recovered for the moment all his liveliness and activity, dictated his letters with amazing facility, and decided at a glance on immense speculations, with the rapidity of thought and correct decision which had made his fortune. But if from time to time his wife tried to amuse him, by reading to him or talking to him, he listened indeed from civility, but he did not hear a word that she said, and he seemed almost nervously impatient that she should close the book of her choice. She soon saw this and left him alone. One of his nieces, whom he had adopted, came every day to spend some hours by his bedside. This young lady tried to fix her uncle's mind on religious subjects, and persevered even when he *seemed* inclined to laugh at what he called her

exaggerated notions. But at length, when she ventured one day to hint at the dangerous nature of his illness, he sternly desired her to be silent.

"It is time enough," said he, "to think of death, when our cares and duties in this life are at an end."

"Yes," replied his niece, "if our Lord had not said, 'Watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is.' " (Mark xiii. 33; Luke xii. 40.)

"Pooh! pooh! death is not so near; I have money enough to frighten him away, by a whole host of doctors and their medicines."

"The rich man in the Bible had money enough for this when he said,—'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years:' yet 'that very night his soul was required of him.' " (Luke xii. 19, 20.)

This courageous answer so irritated Mr. X., that his anger closed the young girl's lips. She went out of his room with tears in her eyes, saying to herself with a deep sigh, "How true it is that 'the love of money is the root of all evil.' " (1 Tim. vi. 10.)

*The sick man was tossed on his uneasy*

couch by violent spasms of pain, which the well paid doctors assured him were only nervous.

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## CHAPTER X.

### THE RICH MAN'S DEATH.

ONE day, the last that he passed on earth, Mr. X. desired that his head clerk should come as usual to tell him what was going on. Mr. Simon almost shuddered, when he entered the room, to see his master's livid face, on which death had already set his seal ; but, like a politic man of the world, he soon recovered his self-possession and assured his employer that he thought him looking much better ! "Very soon," added he, "we may hope to have the pleasure of seeing you again in the office, where your much-desired presence will quicken the zeal of your men, who are quite inspired by your presence to fresh exertion."

After having thus scattered the incense of servility, even on a death-bed, Mr. Simon unfolded a budget of letters, which were briefly *reviewed and decided on* by him who was

soon to leave this earth, and all its concerns. Stimulated by long habit, he listened and gave directions while Mr. Simon recounted to him the progress of the complicated business which was done in his name, in Vienna, Berlin, Odessa, Naples, &c.

At length, while Mr. Simon was reading a letter from London, the invalid was seized with a spasm of pain so violent that all human aid seemed powerless. The doctors were hastily summoned to the side of the bed of agony, and their care and skill availed once more for his relief. The dying man opened his eyes and said, in a faltering voice, "Go on—Mr. Simon."

"Sir?" said the clerk, in an anxious tone.

"Well—go on; tell me—what is the news from London. What a sudden fall—of the funds! ah! how unexpected!"

The attendants present looked at each other in mute surprise, but one of the doctors hastened to compliment Mr. X. on his presence of mind.

"How wonderful! After such a violent attack to take up again at once the thread of business just where it had been broken!"

Such presence of mind is sublime, quite an unusual effort of genius—what a wonderful man!"

"Nevertheless," said another doctor, "do try, my dear sir, to moderate your *excess of feeling*; you are too deeply interested in your business. Wait till your health is a little recovered before you trouble yourself any more with these matters. You will soon be better; these nervous complaints sometimes pass off very quickly."

This very doctor, as he left the room, said in a whisper to the banker's niece: "Do not leave Madame X. alone in her husband's room, for he will not live over the night."

"Oh!" exclaimed the true-hearted young girl with gentle firmness, "will you not be responsible to God for the soul that you have thus deceived even at his last hour!"

The doctor, either not hearing or pretending not to hear, went out hastily, and hurried down the staircase humming a tune.

Still imprisoned in the coat pocket where he had put me, I was present during the last hours of the rich banker. The strong and *active man* had become a cold corpse, beside

which watched the mercenary attendants, who were speculating on their chances of getting a part of his wardrobe, or of being remembered for a trifle in his will. Their master was scarcely buried before they were quarrelling over his cast-off clothes."

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## CHAPTER XI.

### THE PAWNBROKER AND THE BRIBE.

THE coat in which I was hidden fell to the share of a servant, who sold it directly to an old-clothes-man. When he was brushing his new purchase I fell out of the pocket, and he soon picked me up and called to his wife to show her what he had found.

"But," remonstrated his wife, urged by a feeling of honesty unknown to her husband, "ought we not to return this five franc piece to the servant from whom you bought the coat?"

"Indeed! what folly! what is worth finding is worth keeping—we have a good right to what we find."

The wife, convinced by this eloquent rea-

soning, said no more, and returned to her household work.

My new master, besides his trade of old-clothes-man, was also a pawnbroker—a business which brought him many and strange customers. One day a young man apparently about nineteen came in, carrying a watch in his hand.

“Mr. Goulard,” said he, “how much will you lend me on this?”

The pawnbroker turned round the watch and examined it closely on all sides, weighed the chain and the key, which were gold, and then seemed to consider for a moment before giving a decided answer.

“I will lend you fifty francs if you will promise to pay me seventy at the end of a fortnight.”

“Fifty francs! that is very little; and for one fortnight! that is a very short time. I think you are a little of a Jew, my good friend.”

“A Jew!” said the pawnbroker, “a Jew! ah, I wish you had to do with a Jew, you would soon see the difference. A Jew has neither faith nor conscience, while I am a truly

conscientious man. I am giving you more for your old watch than I could get for it were I obliged to sell it; but I hope you will not force me to do this."

"Certainly not; it was my father's watch, and my mother would be in a sad state if I did not take it with me when I go home at the end of the session. In some way or other I must try to redeem it from you before that time."

The poor student pocketed the money, of which I formed part, and returned rapidly to the corner of the street, where a friend was waiting for him. I did not remain long in his possession, and after having been tossed about for some time, I found myself in the hands of a jeweller, into whose shop a young couple came to buy some trifling ornaments. The husband paid for the purchase in gold and I was given to him in exchange. He threw me carelessly into a purse, in which I found myself a few days afterwards travelling with my master on the road between Paris and Nice. As we came near the Sardinian custom-house, the young lady appeared very uneasy about her luggage, for which she seemed

to fear the awkward hands of the custom-house officers. As the carriage stopped at the door of the custom-house, the pretty traveller smiled sweetly to the officer who came up to the carriage; but unmoved by her civility, he said in a cross voice, "This carriage must be unpacked and all the boxes examined; we must search every corner."

The greedy rogues, regardless of the nervous starts of the lady as they touched her things, pulled all her precious boxes into the middle of the court.

Then came the inspector, pulling up his sleeves as if preparing for business. When he had opened one trunk, and plunged his hand into each corner, his superior officer, seeing him so busy, went to receive a carriage which arrived just at the moment. The instant he turned away, my master drew me from his purse, and slipped me into the hand of the inspector; who, equally clever, slipped me into his sleeve, and continued to look into the packages with an air of great business. But his fingers never touched the contents, or even *raised* the silk paper which covered them. *Withheld by me*, he permitted himself to take

only a very slight glance, before his voice was heard saying in loud tones, "This carriage may be packed again; it is all perfectly right."

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE PRIEST AND HIS PRAYERS.

THE inspector had a child who was dying of consumption, and the unhappy mother, who was a Romanist, never ceased telling her husband that their child might live if she could afford to have some masses said for it by the priest; "but," said she sighing, "he asks so very much money for these masses!"

"This child has cost us enough already, without throwing away money on nonsense," said the father. "My opinion is, that the priest's masses will have no more effect than the doctor's remedies have had as yet. These masses are just shams, invented by the priest to make money."

"How can you be so unbelieving? Have you not heard of all the wonderful miracles that have been done by the masses and by the intercession of the saints? You should

have heard all that our neighbour, Girolamo, was telling me this morning."

"Well, if you have so much faith in the saints, why do you not invoke them yourself? You may pray to them directly, instead of paying so much money to the priest for doing it."

"Oh, my prayers would never be worth so much as a holy man's! And then the mass! the mass!"

"I cannot understand why it is necessary to pay for prayers. The priest must be less generous than men usually are, or he would pray for our child without being paid for it."

"You take good care to make the travellers pay for all your civility and service, but you grudge money for any purpose but your own selfish pleasures; and if our child dies, it will be your fault."

The poor ignorant woman begged, prayed, wept, and implored, till her husband, fairly worn out, at length threw me at her feet, saying, "Well, well, I must give you your own way for once."

*I was given to the priest, who mumbled over the masses bargained for; nevertheless*

the poor child died: but the priest pocketed me all the same.

That evening the priest received one of his friends at supper. The meal was both plentiful and luxurious. After it was over, the friends sat chatting together, and both complained of the injury done to their pockets by the incredulity of men, who would not believe in the efficacy of masses.

“We should be ill off were it not for the superstition of women,” said one of them.

“And yet,” replied the other, “it is by no means universal, even among women. Some of them are now pretending to be strong-minded, and are beginning to doubt the infallibility of the Church and the efficacy of masses, as well as their husbands. Since that odious colporteur was here, I have never found my parishioners so obedient or so ready to pay. It was a great pity that we did not manage to arrest him before he had sold so many copies of the Bible. Only imagine that some of my people actually insist on keeping and reading that dangerous book, and go so far as to pretend to understand it for themselves *without my help!*”

“For my part,” said the other, “I settled that matter by excommunicating from the pulpit all who should dare to keep this pernicious volume. After that some of the people got frightened, and brought me their copies, which I burned; but I am much afraid that there are more in the parish that I have not been able to discover. I shall have no peace till every one of them is in the fire.”

“You are right, my friend; war to the death against heresy. It is our only safety; for if we suffer the Bible to spread, it will put an end to the authority of the Church, and will ruin us at the same time. Our pockets will suffer if our people learn from the Bible to pray for themselves, instead of paying for masses.”

The two friends separated, agreeing to do all they could to discover and burn the Bibles left by the colporteur. The priest to whom I now belonged then rang the bell, summoned his housekeeper, and placed me in her hand, saying, “You will give this to Juspino the carrier, and tell him when he goes to Marseilles to bring me the very best chocolate to be had there.”

The housekeeper told her master that a poor woman had just come to ask his prayers for her husband, who had been ill for some months. The priest gravely listened to her story, and after hearing a heart-rending account of her poverty and sufferings, he took a little image out of a drawer, and desired the housekeeper to give it to the poor woman. "Tell her," said he, "that she must say five paternosters three times a-day before this image of St. Joseph, for his intercession is very efficacious."

The housekeeper crossed herself devoutly as she took the image, and quitted the room to give her master's message to the afflicted woman.

The carrier left me in Marseilles, after paying for the priest's chocolate; and I passed through many shops and counting-houses in this town. I remained longest in the wooden bowl of a money-changer, where, exposed under a grating in his window along with pieces of money of all kinds, we attracted the longing eyes of the passers-by. Often the poor beggar, who was holding out his hand to implore a trifle in charity, looked at us and sighed to see such riches lying useless. More than once I have

seen a tear fall from the eye of the labourer who was out of work, and after a vain search for employment, was returning home empty-handed to his wife and his starving children. One of us, only one, would have made him so happy. The little ragged boys of the neighbourhood often gathered round the grated window, talking of all the enjoyments they would have if so much money were theirs; and sometimes they even quarrelled and fought about these castles in the air. Wiser people than they have been known to quarrel over things as unreal.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE PRAYER OF FAITH ANSWERED.

I WAS not sorry at length to leave the money-changer's window; and I found myself a few minutes afterwards in the pocket of a young man who was travelling for the double purpose of amusement and instruction. He visited all the ruins on his way; examined all buildings of any interest; not a single place marked in the guide-book escaped him; and

to the dictation and under the teaching of the guide who accompanied him, he wrote very numerous notes with a gold pencil in an elegant pocket-book of Russian leather, which was fastened with clasps of gold.

The traveller left this precious journal in a hackney coach. He could not remember where he had left it; he had no idea of the number of the coach he had used. He feared his valuable notes were gone for ever, and so much learning and wisdom lost to the world. In despair, he was in the act of preparing an advertisement of his loss for the newspapers, when the much-prized note-book was brought to him by the honest coachman, who had been doing all he could to find out the owner of it.

I was given to the worthy man as a reward for his honesty. He carried me with him to his humble home in the suburbs of the town, and with great joy held me up to his wife, who was waiting for him at the door.

“There,” said he, “the sum is all made up now, and for this year, at least, our cottage is ours once more!”

“Thanks be to God!” said his wife, wiping away a tear of gratitude and joy. “I had

prayed so very earnestly for his blessing; yet not an hour ago I felt quite desponding: but he has not forsaken us; he has heard my prayers.

“ My faith almost failed to-day, when Mr. Rochon came to give me notice that if we did not send him by to-morrow morning the fifteen francs,—the interest of the 200 which he had lent us,—he would turn us out of the cottage. It was in vain that I pleaded with him, and explained to him that the delay was in consequence of your long illness. I begged him to take in the meantime the ten francs which we had gathered. He would not listen to me, and left the house saying, in an angry tone, ‘ No half payments; all, or none.’ ”

“ Ah ! I was very uneasy about it too, for I know the hard and pitiless nature of our creditor. Did he not ruin the widow Perrin ? All the houses in the neighbourhood will soon belong to him if he continues his plan of lending money at excessive interest, and then seizing the goods of every family who are at all behind with their payments.”

“ My dear husband, we must not judge even this hard old man; the word of God for-

bids it. Let us rather pray for this poor, empty heart, who knows not the one thing needful, and makes a god of his money."

"Alas! what good will it all do him at the last day? But I have not yet told you how God in his providence has helped me to-day. I was very sad, not knowing where to turn for assistance in our difficulties, when I found upon the seat of my coach a note-book, ornamented and clasped with gold, worth a great deal of money. For a moment I was tempted to keep it. I said to myself, that it probably belonged to a traveller who had left by the diligence some hours before, and that it would be impossible to find him out; but these words kept sounding in my ears, 'It is a sin to keep what belongs to another;' and I had no rest till I had gone from hotel to hotel to find the owner of the note-book. At last I found the gentleman I had driven in the morning; and he was so glad to see his note-book again that he gave me this as a reward."

"Exactly the five francs we needed to make up the sum!" said his wife. "In this we see the hand of God, who has heard our prayers" (Ps. xxxvii. 3, 23-25).

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE MISER.

THE next day I was carried to Mr. Rochon, who, wrapped in an old dressing-gown, all mended and pieced, was seated in a black leather chair, before an old writing-table. He was counting up rows of figures, which so absorbed his attention, that the honest coachman knocked several times at the door before he could make him hear.

“ Oh, there you are,” said Mr. Rochon at length; “ I hope you have brought my money?”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ So much the better for you, for I was just going to send to my agent to bid him prosecute.”

“ I am sorry we are a little behind this year; but we could not help it; I was long ill—”

“ Oh, yes! always some trifling excuse; debtors have always plenty of excuses ready. I have half ruined myself by believing them, and I have got no thanks for it. After this, I am determined to give no delay, and take

no excuse. I must lay up a trifle for my old age. Here, take your receipt, and be more correct and punctual in future."

The coachman withdrew, and I remained lying on the old writing-table before Mr. Rochon, who went on with his calculations. "39,680 francs, the interest of 400,000 francs lent to different people. What a pity I could not make it 320 francs more!—that would have been a round sum. But I am too easy; I do not exact enough interest. I lose a centime\* here and a centime there; and at the end of the year these all count.

"Here is the letter of my Paris correspondent: 10,000 francs of profit on my last speculation in the Austrian funds. And these funds rose a trifle the very day after I sold! What a pity I did not wait another day! I am always losing something.

"Rent of various farms, 30,000 francs. That is a bad speculation; it is such hard work to make the farmers pay; justice is so slow in proceeding against them; and I think my agent is slower still. He is not so zealous and sharp as he ought to be; he is always

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\* A centime is the hundredth part of a franc.

sending me some excuse for the lazy creatures. He gets soft over their stories of misfortune, and writes me about the numerous family of one, and the bad harvest of another. Oh, it is hard work to get one's due!"

Here the only servant of this poor-rich man interrupted his calculations by bringing him his breakfast, which consisted of a single cup of coffee, without sugar, and a halfpenny roll.

"Marianne," said Mr. Rochon to his house-keeper, "this coffee is very strong; you must have put in more than I ordered."

"Monsieur may satisfy himself of that by measuring what remains."

"Well, at all events, you may make it still weaker. Times are so hard, and everything so dear, that we must retrench. Do not buy any more white rolls for my breakfast: a crust of household bread\* will do for me."

"I shall get what Monsieur chooses," replied Marianne. But as she left the room, she muttered to herself—"You old miser! your nephews will not give you any thanks for starving yourself to leave them a few crowns

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\* What is called in France "pain de menage,"—household bread,—is dark-coloured, often almost black, heavy, and bad.

more. How finely they will make your money fly after you are dead!"

After having ate the slight repast which was to serve him till five o'clock in the afternoon, Mr. Rochon double locked the door of his room, then cast an uneasy glance round him, peered into every corner, as if he feared that any inquisitive eye should see him, then touching a spring, a panel in the wainscot opened, and disclosed a strong box of iron, the cover of which he slowly raised. It was divided into different compartments, each filled with pieces of gold and silver of various kinds. Mr. Rochon seemed to enjoy looking at them, counting them, and piling them up straight. He said to himself, "It is a good thing to have a little laid by for a rainy day. No one in the world knows about my little treasure here. It is but very slowly that I am able to add to it. I have been working hard for twenty years, and although I put in all I can save, and all the fractions of my payments, I have not more here than 50,000 francs in reserve. All the rest must be out at interest, risked in *speculations*; but at least I will put another five francs to my little savings." So saying,

the old Croesus laid me upon a pile of others in the box. I have been reposing there three years, and shall probably remain so imprisoned till the death of the old maniac, to whom I am about as useful as a piece of flint picked up on the road.

Everything is valuable only as it is put to use. A piece of silver is of no more use than a piece of stone, if it is only hoarded. A man of talent who makes no good use of his talents is worse than a fool. Money and talents are both given to be used ; or rather, they are *lent* to us for a time, that we may use them for the service of Him whose we are, who has given us all we possess, and who will one day ask an account of how his gifts have been used (Matt. xxv. 14-30).

“ Our gifts are only well enjoyed  
When used as talents lent ;  
Those talents only well employed  
When in God’s service spent.”









# THE TOUCH OF GOLD;

OR,

## The Philosopher's Stone.

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THERE was once a very rich king called Midas, who lived long long ago. He had a little daughter, of whom no one has ever heard except me, and I do not remember her name. Perhaps I may have heard it, but if so, I have forgotten it; so, as I like fancy names for such little fairy personages, I shall call her *Marygold*.

King Midas loved gold more than anything else in the world. He valued his royal crown chiefly because it was composed of this precious metal. If there was anything which he loved nearly as well as his gold, it was his pretty little daughter, who played so gracefully on the golden steps of his throne.

*The more Midas loved this pretty child, so*

much the more did he desire riches, he said and thought, for her. He imagined, foolish man as he was, that the best thing he could do for the child he loved so much, was to leave her plenty of the bright yellow money, which fools have ever valued beyond anything else, and hoarded up ever since the beginning of the world, or, at least, ever since men learned to find gold.

All the thoughts and all the time of the king were devoted to this one object. He loved, he cared for nothing else. If his eye rested for a moment with pleasure on the brilliant clouds of sunset, he thought the next minute how fine it would be if he could turn all this golden glow into real tangible gold, and shut it up in his money-box!

When little Marygold ran to meet her father, with her apron full of golden broom, or of bright yellow butter-cups, he always said, "Pooh ! pooh ! my child, these fading flowers are of no use ; if they were only really made of the metal which they resemble in colour, then, indeed, they would be worth the trouble of gathering !"

*Yet, in his early youth, before he became*

the victim of a passion for gold, King Midas had loved flowers. He had made a rose-garden, where grew flowers the most exquisite that had ever regaled the sight or sense of mortals. These lovely roses had lost none of their beauty, their fragrance was as sweet as ever ; but now Midas cared not for it, and if he went into the lovely garden at all, it was only to reckon how much it might be worth if he could turn its beauty and fragrance into hard money. In youth Midas had loved music, and he might have been soothed by the gentle sound of the soft south wind breathing among the leaves of his rose-garden ; but now he cared for nothing but the *clink* of the golden coin as he counted it on the bare boards of his money-table.

It is said, that as people grow older they sometimes grow wiser ; but this was not the case with Midas. As he grew older, he seemed more and more to lose common sense, so that at length he cared for nothing but gold. He passed most of his time in a dismal vault below his palace. Here he kept his hoarded treasure, and to it he resorted whenever he wished to enjoy a happy hour. Then he de-

scended the steps that led to this dark dungeon, and carefully shutting the strong iron doors behind him, he took up a sack filled with gold pieces, or a box of gold dust, and carried it near the narrow window,—a mere slit in the strong stone wall, which admitted only one ray of sunshine. He loved this solitary sunbeam, not for its own beauty, but because it cast a brighter and more golden glow on the contents of his money-bags. He sat in the dismal cell admiring the light on his gold pieces,—watching the bright ray sparkle through the showers of gold dust as he lifted the powdered metal and let it fall through his fingers,—or looking at his own image reflected on the polished surface of a golden cup. When thus occupied, he said to himself, “O Midas ! fortunate King Midas ! what a happy mortal are you !”

Nothing could have been more amusing than to see the foolish king making satisfied faces and pleased grimaces at himself, as he looked into his golden mirror ; it seemed almost as if the shadow reflected there had really life and sense, and was mocking and mimicking the silly king who sat before it.

Yet though he fancied himself happy, Midas still felt an aching void in the midst of his happiness, a blank that he could not fill up. His satisfaction, even amid his golden treasures, was never quite complete,—there was something always wanting,—he still longed for something more than he had.

It is surely quite unnecessary to remind such learned children as our young readers, that in the long-ago times, when King Midas lived, many strange things happened which never happen now, in our times, and in our country; whilst, on the other hand, many things happen now in our times which would not have been believed by the people who lived long ago. Long ago was the time of the fairies. Now is the time of science; and, to tell the truth, the wonders of science are more wonderful than fairy tales. But, in the meantime, we must go on with our story.

One day that Midas was sitting in his dismal vault, counting the contents of his money-bags, a shadow all at once darkened the one ray of sunlight that shone through his narrow window. He looked up, and saw the figure

wended the steps  
and carefully  
behind him, by  
pieces, or a boy  
near the narrow  
strong stone  
ray of sunshine  
beam, not for  
made a brighter  
creations of his  
dreadful call also  
phone — went  
through the  
the powdered  
fingers — at  
on the polished  
also occupied  
a corner — but  
the

ne,—unless the stranger had come to swell  
easure ! With this hope he watched the  
ments of his guest.

The stranger cast his eyes round the dismal  
room, and after enlightening with his smile all  
which he looked, he said, " You are very  
rich, King Midas. I doubt whether there is  
gold in all the world beside than the  
gold which you have hoarded here."

" I have succeeded tolerably well," replied  
Midas, with a half-satisfied air ; " but, after  
my success is nothing very astonishing,  
when you consider that I have been obliged  
to labour all my life to attain it ! What can  
I do in so short a life ! If, indeed, one  
might live for a thousand years, then, truly,  
he might become rich ! "

" What ! " exclaimed the stranger, " are you  
not yet content ? Do you not yet think that  
you are rich enough ? "

Midas shook his head.

" What then can satisfy you ? " asked the  
stranger. " Tell me ; even from curiosit  
I should like to know."

Midas was silent and thoughtful. A  
silence made him feel that this

and noble stranger had very probably the power of granting his very boldest request, of realizing his very wildest dreams. The favourable moment in his life had come at last,—he had only to speak to have all his wishes gratified !

He remained for some minutes plunged in thought, and in fancy heaping mountains upon mountains of gold, yet still unsatisfied ; at length, all at once, a bright idea struck him, and he looked up with anxious eyes in the bright face of the stranger.

“ Well, Midas, said the unknown, I see that you have at last discovered what will satisfy you. Tell me, then, what is your wish ?”

“ It is easily told,” replied the miser king. “ I am tired of the trouble of gathering together heaps of gold and silver, which, after all, are not enough to satisfy me ; and, therefore, I would like to have the power of turning into gold everything which I touch !”

The smile of the stranger became brighter still at this speech, and shed over the darkened room a golden glow, like the glorious beams of the setting sun shining on the yellow leaves of a forest in autumn.

"The touch of gold!" exclaimed he; "all honour to thee, King Midas, for having conceived so bright an idea. But are you very sure that its fulfilment will really make you happy?"

"How could it be otherwise?" said Midas, in surprise; for happiness and gold were inseparable in his eyes.

"And are you sure," said the stranger, "that you will never regret being endowed with this marvellous power?"

"What reason *could* I have to regret it?" replied Midas. "I ask nothing more to make me perfectly happy."

"Well, your wish is granted!" said the unknown, waving his hand, as if saying farewell. "To-morrow, then, at the first rising of the sun, you shall feel that you have received the touch of gold!"

As the stranger spoke, such a brilliant light shone around him, that Midas was almost dazzled; he shut his eyes for a moment, and when he opened them again the stranger was gone, as if he had glided out of the dungeon *on the bright path of sunbeam which shone in at the narrow window.*

Our story does not tell if Midas slept as well as usual on that eventful night. Sleeping or waking, however, his mind was full of the golden promise of the stranger, and he was as excited as a child who is expecting a new toy. Scarcely had day dawned when King Midas arose, eager to try his new power. He first touched his curtains, then the chair which stood beside his bed; and what was his disappointment to see them unchanged by his touch! He began to fear that the golden promise of the stranger had been false, or that all that had passed was but a bright and passing dream!

The truth was, that Midas had been too impatient—he had mistaken the glimmering twilight for the glorious day—the first footsteps of Aurora for the golden sunrise. He had fallen back on his pillow in despair, when all at once a bright sun ray struck upon his closed eyelids and awoke him to new hopes. He started up, and as he touched the white coverlet of his bed, it suddenly assumed a *golden hue*. What was his delight to see in *a moment* that his pillows, his sheets, all *around him shone* like the purest gold! He

had received the touch of gold precisely at sunrise, the very time foretold by his fairy visitor.

Transported with joy, Midas started from his bed, and began to try the power of his wonderful touch on all the furniture of his bed-room. He put his hand on the post of his bed, and immediately it became a splendid pillar of fluted gold. He drew aside the curtain of the window, that he might see more clearly the wonders he was working, and the tassel which he touched fell heavily from his hand, a mass of solid gold. He moved a book which lay on the table, and it shone immediately as if it had been not only gilt, but bound in sheets of gold. He turned the leaves, and each leaf he turned became a thin sheet of gold. To be sure this had one disadvantage,—the printing became illegible, the book could not be read. But what did that signify to Midas! Was he not rich enough now to despise books, he who valued only gold? He hastened to dress, and was charmed to find that each article of his dress became cloth of gold as he put it on. *His clothes preserved their shape and fit, and were*

really wonderfully comfortable still, notwithstanding the weight of the material; at least he thought so, infatuated as he was: but most people might like linen and flannel better than cloth of gold after all! He drew out of his pocket a handkerchief hemmed for him by the white hands of the little Marygold herself; even this was changed—the delicate embroidery, the small stitches put in by those fairy fingers, all were gold. To tell the truth, this did not quite please King Midas; he would have liked to keep his little daughter's work just as it came from her hands, as she had given it to him, when, delighted with her first performance, she had scrambled on his knee to demand a kiss as her reward.

But this could not be helped; after all, it was a trifle in the tide of wealth flowing upon him. So King Midas consoled himself, and put on his spectacles to see more distinctly how much all around him was changed. In those long-ago times spectacles had not been invented for the use of ordinary mortals, but were made only for kings; so King Midas had *one pair*, which he valued highly. But to his ~~great~~ surprise, he found he could see with

them no longer,—the clear glasses had been changed into gold, and he could not see through them—the spectacles were useless !

This was disagreeable enough, for without the spectacles he could not see half his riches and magnificence; but there was no help for it. “It is no great matter, after all,” said he, with the resignation of a Stoic; “I may well sacrifice a pair of spectacles for such a precious gift as the touch of gold. After all, my eyes are not so very bad yet; and if I cannot see to read, my little daughter will soon be old enough to read to me.”

King Midas was so uplifted by his good fortune, that the walls of his palace seemed too narrow to contain his greatness. He hastened down the great staircase, and smiled as he descended, to see the railing which he touched become solid gold as he passed. He raised the latch of the door, once only polished brass, but at the first touch of his fingers gold like the rest. He went into the rose-garden. The morning air was sweet with the breath of the roses; many were half blown, some still *buds*,—all fresh and fragrant. Little Midas cared for their beauty or their freshness. He

knew how to make them lovelier in *his* eyes. He hastened from bush to bush with indefatigable activity, till each flower, each fresh bud, each green leaf, even the very worms that were hidden among the foliage, became yellow and stiff and golden. When his task was nearly done, King Midas was summoned to breakfast; and as, after his work in the keen morning air, he was more hungry than is usual for a king, he was not slow to obey the summons.

I am not sure on what kings breakfasted in those long-ago times, I have not had time to make many inquiries on the subject; but I believe that the breakfast prepared that day for King Midas consisted of little cakes fresh baked and hot, small fresh-water trouts, roasted potatoes, fresh eggs, and coffee. Besides this, there was a bowl of warm new milk, and some slices of neatly cut bread and butter, for the little princess. Whether this account of the breakfast be perfectly correct or not, at all events it is a breakfast fit for a king.

When King Midas reached the breakfast room, little Marygold had not yet made her appearance. Her father desired her to be

called, and in the meantime he placed himself at table. He soon heard the voice of his much-loved daughter, weeping bitterly. This surprised him much, for little Marygold was one of the merriest and happiest of children, and scarcely ever shed a tear. Hearing her cries of distress, Midas thought he would comfort her by giving her a pleasant surprise. He touched the pretty china bowl which held her milk, and turned it into a golden basin.

Marygold entered the room sobbing and holding her little apron to her eyes.

“ Well, my dear little girl, what is the matter with you? what vexes you on such a lovely morning? ” said her royal father.

Marygold, without taking her apron from her eyes, held out her hand, in which was one of the gold roses.

“ Is it not splendid? ” said her father. “ What is there about this precious rose to cause you so much sorrow? ”

“ Oh, my dear father, ” replied the child, “ this rose is not pretty now; it is the ugliest thing I ever saw. As soon as I was dressed this morning, I ran to the garden to gather a pretty nosegay for you; because I know that

you always like the flowers better when your little girl has gathered them. But, oh ! can you imagine what has happened ? What a misfortune ! All the roses, which smelt so sweet, and were so very beautiful, have become yellow and dry,—their freshness is gone, they have no smell and no beauty now. What can have caused this ?”

“ Pooh, pooh ! my darling,” said King Midas, “ do not weep for such a trifle.” In truth he was half ashamed of having himself caused the change which had made the child so unhappy. “ Sit down, my little one; eat your bread, my child, and drink your fresh milk. This beautiful golden rose will last for a hundred years; and if you do not like it, you may easily exchange it for dozens of common roses which wither in a day.”

“ I don’t care for these hard, yellow roses,” said Marygold, throwing down the golden rose with disdain; “ they have no smell, and the dry sharp leaves hurt my nose.”

The child sat down to breakfast, but she was so unhappy and so occupied with what *had passed*, that she never observed the change *on her bowl*. If she had, most likely it would

have caused a fresh burst of grief; for she had been very fond of the pictures on her china bowl, painted in bright colours, and would have been vexed to see them all turned yellow.

In the meantime the king had poured out a cup of coffee for himself, and of course the coffee-pot had become gold. Midas was thinking that if all the tea-service were changed in the same way, he would have no chest fit to keep such valuable plate; and while he was resolving to have a new one made, he carelessly put the spoon into his cup of coffee, and stirred it. The spoon was instantly gold; and as he raised it to his mouth he was surprised to feel that the coffee, too, was changed into boiling metal as soon as it touched his lips! It scalded him, and he threw it down hastily with a slight scream, —rather unkingly.

“What is the matter, my dear father?” asked Marygold, looking at him in astonishment, with her eyes bathed in tears.

“Nothing, my child,—nothing,” said Midas; “but take your breakfast; do not let it get cold.”

So saying, he helped himself to one of the nice fresh trouts; but he shuddered to see that no sooner had he cut it in two, than it became a golden fish. It would have signified little if it had turned into one of the gold fish which are kept for ornament in so many drawing-rooms,—these would at least have been eatable, if not very good; but the fish was not like these,—it was a fish of real solid gold, carved, scales and all, as correctly and delicately as if it had been done by the best jeweller in the world. The bones, the fins, all were beautifully wrought in gold; even the mark of the fork of King Midas was seen, graven on the golden fish as if by a master hand. It was truly a wonderful work of art! Yet at the moment King Midas would rather have had a real trout on his plate, than this most splendid and precious imitation.

“I really do not know,” thought he, “what I am to do—how I am to get a breakfast at all!”

He took one of the nice hot cakes, and having broken it hastily, put it quickly to his *mouth*; as if he could eat it before the change *took place*. But before it reached his lips, it

was as yellow as if it had been baked of maize. Oh, if it had only been really a cake of maize, how Midas would have rejoiced ; but he was in despair when he found that it was but a cake of gold, which his teeth could not pierce. Almost in despair, he tried an egg, but with like bad success ; the eggs were golden, too, as well as the trouts and the cake.

“ Here I am in a sad state, in a great difficulty,” thought King Midas, as he threw himself back in his chair in despair, looking with envious, hungry eyes, at the little girl, enjoying her bowl of fresh milk, and her nice slices of bread and butter. “ Is it not hard,” continued the poor king, still speaking to himself, “ that I must see before me such a good breakfast, which I cannot taste ! ”

Still hoping in some way to free himself by skill and address from his difficulty, Midas resolved to try once more, and bravely seizing a nice smoking potato, he tried to swallow it instantly, before there was time for the wonderful change. But the gift of the golden touch had a magic power, which worked quicker than he could even think. He felt himself almost choked, not by a nice mealy

potato, but by a solid lump of hot gold, which so burned his tongue that he uttered a loud cry of pain, and was glad to spit it out. Starting up hastily from the table, he began to jump about and scream with the sudden torture.

“ My father ! my dear father ! ” cried little Marygold, in a great fright. “ What can be the matter ? Have you burned your tongue ? ”

“ Oh, my poor darling child,” replied Midas, with a deep groan, “ I do not know what will become of your poor father ! ”

In truth, few people were more to be pitied at that moment than poor King Midas. The most magnificent breakfast was before him, served in rich golden dishes ; and it was its very magnificence which hindered him from being able to eat it. The poorest labourer, seated at his humble table before a crust of bread and an earthen jug of water, was really better served than King Midas, whose precious food was actually worth its weight in gold. What was to become of him ? He was already starving of hunger, and it was only the *breakfast hour*. What should he feel by *dinner time* ? Would he not be nearly dead

before the hour of supper, more especially as he could not doubt that dinner and supper would be composed alike of the same too precious materials. He began to count how many days he could hope to survive on such a *rich* and *costly* kind of diet.

These sad reflections troubled King Midas not a little, and suggested the thought whether, after all, gold is the best thing in the world, or even the most desirable. Still, this was but a passing thought ; even then Midas was not hungry enough to give up the touch of gold for such a trifling matter as the loss of his breakfast. Only think what a breakfast would have cost at such a price. He must have given untold millions of money for a little coffee, a fresh egg, a cake, and a few trouts. He could not consent to pay so dear for them ; yet, in truth, he was very hungry, and the struggle in his mind was so great that he could not repress a deep groan.

On hearing this, little Marygold looked up from her breakfast. She saw that something troubled her father : she could not quite understand what it was, but it was enough for *her* that he was in distress. She ran to him,

climbed upon his knee, and tried, in her childish way, to console him by kisses and caresses. At that moment, even Midas felt that the love of his child was worth more than all the gold in the world.

“ My dear jewel ! my precious treasure ! ” said he, kissing the lovely child ;—but Marygold answered not, spoke not, moved not. Alas ! what had he done ? What a fatal gift was his ! His hands had no sooner been folded round his child, his lips had no sooner touched her fair brow, than that sweet face and those delicate features had become stiff and cold ; the lovely complexion had assumed a yellow tinge, the rich brown curls had lost their wavy grace, the elegant figure was stiffened and metallized by her father’s touch ;—poor victim of her father’s love of riches, the beautiful Marygold was now a golden statue !

Yet her eyes, though cold and fixed, still retained a look of love and entreaty,—an expression of the deepest sympathy and affection was still on the beautiful face ; the delicate *features* of Marygold were all preserved, and the golden resemblance was most touching. *The father’s heart was rent with grief as he*

saw before him the image of his darling,—but only the cold, immovable image. He well remembered how in past times he had been accustomed to praise his little daughter, by saying that she was worth her weight in gold. His words were now strictly true; but now, alas! he felt, too late, that the love of such a tender, affectionate heart, was worth more than all the riches of the earth.

Words cannot express the grief of King Midas—he wrung his hands, and lamented bitterly. The beautiful little golden figure seemed to be mutely entreating him to restore to it motion and life; but how to do this he knew not. He could only weep and lament, tear his hair, and call himself the most miserable man in the world. At that moment he would have gladly given all his golden treasures to see a faint tinge of rosy colour returning to the cheeks of his darling.

All at once the door opened, and the mysterious stranger appeared on the threshold. Midas hung down his head, and uttered not a word; he had recognised the unknown *from whom he had received the fatal gift of the touch of gold.* There was a smile on the

face of the stranger, and his presence seemed to cast a yellow light over everything in the room, more especially on the stiffened form of the little Marygold.

“Well, my friend,” said he, “tell me, I pray you, how you like my gift, the touch of gold?”

Midas shook his head sorrowfully. “I am very very miserable,” said he.

“What! very miserable! How can that be? Have I not faithfully performed my promise? Are not all your wishes granted?”

“Gold is not everything,” said Midas. “I have lost the thing in the world which I loved the best.”

“Ah, ha! so you have made that discovery since yesterday. Well then, now choose, which will you have? the gift of the touch of gold, or a refreshing cup of cool water.”

“Oh, water! cold water! what a blessing!” exclaimed Midas. “Shall it ever again refresh my parched throat?”

“Will you have the touch of gold,” continued the stranger, “or a crust of dry bread?”

“Oh!” groaned the starving Midas, “a

crust of bread would be worth more than gold to me now."

"Will you keep the touch of gold, or will you rather have the little Marygold restored to you as she was, full of life, and grace, and love?"

"Oh! my child! my child!" said the unhappy father, wringing his hands in despair, "I would not give one of her loving smiles for a ball of gold the size of this world."

"You are wiser now than you were a few days ago," said the unknown, looking gravely at King Midas. "I am glad to see that your heart has not been quite hardened into cold metal. Had it been so, your case would have been indeed desperate. But you seem to be still capable of seeing that the common blessings, such as are freely bestowed on the poorest, are of more real value than great riches. Are you honestly desirous to get rid of the touch of gold?"

"It is hateful to me!" replied Midas. Just at that moment a fly touched his face: it fell at once to the ground stiff and dead—a golden insect! Midas shuddered at the sight.

“ Well,” said the stranger, “ go and plunge into the river which flows through your garden. After you have bathed, bring from thence a vase of its waters, and sprinkle everything that you wish to restore to its former state. If you do this in good faith, you may perhaps be able to repair the mischief you have done by your avarice.”

The monarch bent humbly before the stranger. When he again raised his head, the brilliant vision had disappeared.

You may easily imagine that Midas did not lose a moment in hastening to the garden. He caught up an earthen vase as he passed, but it was gold before he reached the bank of the river. Wherever he passed, the grass became yellow, and the bushes round him grew dry and stiff. Horror-struck, he dashed headlong into the cool water. “ Oh, what a refreshing bath ! ” said he, as soon as he raised his head from the water. “ I hope it may have purified me for ever from the touch of gold.” So saying, he hastened to fill his vase. *How his heart beat with joy, to see the plain earthen vase, gold no longer.* At the same time, he became aware that a great change

had taken place on himself: he seemed to breathe more freely, a heavy weight seemed to be lifted from his heart. The truth was, that his very heart had been hardening into gold,—it had become cold and heavy and insensible; but it was once more softened into a warm heart of flesh. Seeing a little violet growing by the river side, Midas hastened to touch it—and oh! joy unspeakable! it remained unchanged!—its delicate blossoms were as blue, and its smell as sweet as ever! Midas had at last got rid of the hateful touch of gold.

He hurried to the palace, he passed quickly through a throng of gaping servants, astonished to see their master carrying an earthen pitcher of water. Little did they think how precious this water was to him, for he hoped it might repair the wrong he had done, and restore to him his loved and loving child. He would not have exchanged these precious drops for an ocean of liquid gold.

No sooner had the cool water touched the face of the child, than her brow became once more white and fair, and a delicate pink tinged her cheeks; her form became gradually

less stiff, and when she came to herself, the first thing she saw was her father pouring water over her.

“Oh! stop, stop! my dear father,” exclaimed she; “what can you mean? See, I am quite drenched, and you are spoiling my nice new frock; it was put on for the first time this morning.”

Marygold did not know that she had been a little golden statue: she was quite unconscious of all that had taken place, and remembered nothing from the time that she had climbed on her father’s knee, to console him when she thought he was in distress.

Midas did not think it necessary to confess to his child all the folly of which he had been guilty, or to tell her of the risk she had run. He contented himself with proving practically that he was now become a wiser man. He hastened into the garden with Marygold, and sprinkled water over the flowers with such success that the roses bloomed again with all their former beauty and fragrance.

Two things remained to remind King *Midas* all his life of the miserable days he *had spent*: The sands of the river sparkled

like gold dust, and a golden tinge remained on little Marygold's rich brown curls. This change, while it served to remind her father of his folly, added a new charm to the child, for her glossy hair was even more beautiful than before, when brightened with a golden glow.

King Midas having become quite a sensible man in his old age, often amused his grandchildren by telling them the story of the touch of gold; and as he played with the curls of their silken hair, he told them to observe that they had the same golden tinge as their mother's, she who was once the little Marygold.

“To tell you the truth, my darlings,” said King Midas, as he finished his story, “ever since that terrible morning I have hated the very sight of gold, and I cannot even bear to see anything of a golden colour, except these rich glossy curls.”

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The story of King Midas is but a fairy tale, and yet there is a deep meaning in it for those who will search it out.

*There are among us men, even at the*

present day, who seem to have received the touch of gold, so constantly does a golden stream follow all their undertakings. Yet they too often find, like King Midas, that it neither gives contentment nor peace. Riches may be permitted to cast a ray of pleasant sunshine over the darker shades of life, like the golden glow on Marygold's dark hair; they may be a mere shadow, a passing ornament, but not the solid material of which to form the realities of life. The richest man who ever lived pronounced his wealth and all its enjoyments to be but "vanity and vexation of spirit;" and truly he found it so.

Nor is this all. Riches have a hardening power on the heart of their possessor; they too often make him unfeeling to others, and *selfish*, which is but another word for *miserable*. We have the highest evidence to prove that "silver will not satisfy," nor will heaps of gold quench the hunger and thirst of the soul.

Yet there is a remedy. There is a fountain of living water, ever flowing, free to all, common to all, which can quench and satisfy the soul's thirst—water so pure and life-giving, *that he who* drinks of it can never thirst

again. Washed in this stream, the hardened heart of stone becomes a heart of flesh ; the false, hollow glitter of the world disappears, and the joy and freshness of a new life, the truthfulness of renewed nature, replaces the cold false glitter of this world's vanities and follies. All who drink of this water become true and real again, and awake to a renewed life. Watered by the dew of heaven, the fresh roses bloom beneath the reviving beams of the Sun of Righteousness.

To understand this allegory, we must do what is always necessary when we wish to know *what is truth*—we must search the *only* volume where *perfect truth* is to be found.

Let all who would profit by the story learn the prayer of Agur, and remember that “great gain” consists not in heaps of gold, but in “godliness with contentment.”





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